

Abstract 149

TITLE: Prevalence, Predictors, and Presumptions for Never Having Been HIV Tested Among Young Men Who Have Sex with Men in Seven Urban Areas.

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BACKGROUND/OBJECTIVES: Although young men who have sex with men (YMSM) may be at high risk for becoming HIV-infected or infecting others, their HIV testing behaviors are not well described. Our objectives are to identify the prevalence, the predictors, and the reported reasons for never having been previously HIV-tested among YMSM sampled in 7 U.S. urban areas from 1994-1998.

METHODS: The Young Men's Survey was a cross-sectional, community-based, probability survey of 15- to 22-year-old YMSM who attended public venues frequented by YMSM. Participants were enrolled at venues, and then interviewed, counseled, and HIV tested.

RESULTS: Although HIV (7%) and HIV-related risk behaviors were very prevalent for the 2543 YMSM sampled, 910 (35%) had never been previously HIV-tested: 36% of the HIV-negative versus 20% of the HIV-positive (odds ratio [OR], 2.2; confidence interval [CI], 1.5-3.3). Using logistic regression modeling with backward elimination, we found these predictors for never having been previously HIV-tested: having lower sexual and drug-using HIV-related risks (as measured by a number of variables); being 15-19 years old (OR, 2.0; CI, 1.7-2.4); being less "out" about having sex with men (OR, 1.8; CI, 1.5-2.2); and being Asian American (OR, 1.7; CI, 1.2-2.4). When the 910 YMSM who had never been previously tested were asked why, the most prevalent reason(s) they reported were: perceived low risk for HIV (46%), fear of learning the results (37%), and fear of needles (17%).

CONCLUSIONS: Although HIV and HIV-related risks were very prevalent among the YMSM, they were less prevalent among those never previously tested. Indeed, many YMSM who had never been previously tested perceived themselves to be at low risk for HIV. HIV testing among YMSM might be increased by targeting adolescents, YMSM who are less "out", and Asian Americans, and by messages which reduce fear of testing and needles.

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